

Congress Passes Historic Food Safety Legislation

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Legislation Sent to the President Will Help Protect Sacramento Families, Public Health

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, Congress completed final action on H.R. 2751, the Food Safety Modernization Act, which is important legislation to update our nation's outdated food safety laws to better protect American consumers. Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-California) voted in favor of the legislation, which passed the House today, because it will help ensure the health and safety that Sacramento families, seniors, and children all expect and deserve.

"We often assume that we do not have to worry about a hidden threat contained in our meal. Unfortunately, recent events have shown that the globalization of food markets means we must be increasingly vigilant in protecting ourselves from these threats," said Congresswoman Matsui. "We have a right to know where the food we buy comes from and if it is safe. Once enacted, this law will bring the FDA standards into the twenty-first century."

On average, 14 people die each day from eating unsafe food and thousands of others are hospitalized due to foodborne illness. These illnesses take a huge physical, emotional, and financial toll on millions of American families every year. Moreover, foodborne illnesses disproportionately affect certain populations, like children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. The Food Safety Modernization Act is a bipartisan plan that provides new food safety tools and updates food safety standards to ensure the safety of our food supply.

"Californians have experienced growing concerns in recent years about the safety of our food supply, and specifically agricultural products," added Matsui. "In Sacramento, we are privileged to enjoy locally grown produce, and this legislation is instrumental in helping to prevent food borne illnesses and protect local farmers from detrimental sales losses as a result."

Almost identical food safety legislation was passed in the House on December 8th, and an earlier version of the legislation passed in July of 2009. The Senate passed H.R. 2751 on Sunday and sent it back to the House for final passage. The bill will now be sent to the President's desk for his signature.

Key Provisions of the Food Safety Modernization Act as passed today by the House are as follows:

- Requires facilities to identify, evaluate, and address hazards and prevent adulteration via a food safety plan. In certain circumstances, gives FDA access to these plans and relevant documentation;
- Provides for laboratory accreditation bodies to ensure U.S. food testing labs meet high quality standards and, in certain circumstances, requires food testing performed by these labs to be reported to FDA;
- Allows FDA to enable qualified 3rd parties to certify that foreign food facilities comply with U.S. food safety standards;
- Requires importers to verify the safety of foreign suppliers and imported food. Allows FDA to require certification for high-risk foods, and to deny entry to a food that lacks certification or that is from a foreign facility that has refused U.S. inspectors;
- Increases the number of FDA inspections at all food facilities;
- Allows FDA to initiate a mandatory recall of a food product when a company fails to voluntarily recall the contaminated product upon FDA's request;
- Allows FDA to suspend a food facility's registration if there is a reasonable probability that food from the facility will cause serious adverse health consequences or death;
- Directs FDA to help food companies protect their products from intentional contamination, and calls for a national strategy to protect our food supply from terrorist threats and rapidly respond to food emergencies;
- Authorizes increased funding for FDA's food safety activities, such as hiring personnel, and includes targeted non-compliance fees for domestic and foreign facilities; and
- Provides training for facilities to comply with the new safety requirements and includes special accommodations for small businesses and farms.

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